

[SKINNER]

Christianity and Islam

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When a young Catholic receives a wife through the mission, he may visit 797
 her father and pay the customary respect by giving him kola nuts and brass 582
 coins. The father of a mission girl may accept or reject his son-in-law as he 634
 sees fit, but formerly he could not defy the power of the missions.

A pagan youth who wishes to marry one of the mission girls has to discuss
 the matter with the priests and swear publicly that he will become a Christian.
 Before 1946 the young man had to fulfill his promise or be intimidated by the
 chief and the missionaries until he relented or fled the district. Today, how-
 ever, the priests usually abandon their efforts to obtain the conversion of the
 young men after three months have passed. In some cases the young men take
 their wives and move to other districts, and return only after the girls have
 given up Catholicism. Despite the lure of wives from the mission, not many
 young men become Christians on this account because the Mossi are still 596
 concerned primarily with family relationships and the effect that conversion
 would have on these relationships.

The church's prohibition of polygyny is by far the most serious bar to 797
 the spread of Catholicism. Many men do not adopt Catholicism simply be- 595
 cause they fear that monogamous marriages would not produce children. 842
 Father Paternot (Considine 1954:103) has cited a study purporting to show
 that Christian Mossi have more children than the pagans, but the ordinary
 people of the district would not accept the facts he presented. They cite their
 personal experience to the contrary. Dim Delobson (1934:136), a Mossi con-
 verted to Catholicism, states:

A certain number of Christians of my acquaintance whose wives did not have
 children during the first years of marriage had recourse to magical practices in order
 to get children. These simple people thought that although they had an omnipotent
 God beside them, they could impudently—after all the good priests will not know about
 it—ask the little, but also powerful gods to grant them some material favors here on
 earth. When the gods given children were taken for Holy Baptism, they were given
 Christian names instead of the names of the earth shrines, and they did not wear
 magical charms which would have indicated to the priest the real state of affairs.
 Nevertheless, the children were bathed in water to which magical potions were added,
 and when the mothers went to visit their parents, sacrifices of chickens were given to
 the benevolent Tengougas.

The Mossi's strong desire for children is admittedly one of the main reasons
 for leaving the Catholic Church so that they can take other spouses in addition
 to barren ones. The church has now belatedly recognized this problem and,
 knowing that it cannot prevent men from taking plural wives, allows them
 to come to church but prohibits them from taking the Mass.

Many cultural factors besides the desire for children make polygyny im- 595
 portant for the Mossi, and make conversion detrimental to the functioning 797
 of their family system. Because of lineage opposition to their conversions, 182
 some converts are forced to establish nuclear households—a practice out of
 harmony with the normal rhythm of Mossi life. The reason for this disharmony 594
 is that Mossi women married to Catholics must work alone instead of with